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"Socjologia dobroczynności", Jadwiga Królikowska, Warszawa 2004 : [recenzja]

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REVIEWS–REPORTS

Aleksandra Zienko (rev.): *Jadwiga Królikowska, Socjologia dobroczynności [The Sociology of Charity], “Żak”, Warszawa 2004, pp. 358.*

The book of Jadwiga Królikowska may slightly scare off at first glance – 350 pages, almost a five page table of contents, the text font the smallest allowable to print. In addition the subject, given in subtitle, restricts the title issues of poverty to English experiences which may raise the question whether such a precisely pinpointed problem requires such an extensive study. These are the reflections just before reading the book, having taken it to your hand for the first time. The question though is: What reflections might arise having read the whole – will the initial purely “technical” doubts sink into oblivion, and will the book turn out to be a very interesting read? Or will they prove to be harbingers of subsequent more unsettling substantial errors? Within the confines of introduction I am only going to say that yes and no, and along with the review progression I will try to develop and justify this off-hand opinion.

The subject of the book is the issue of charity. Charity is seen by the author as the key to many important issues of modern

sociology’ (p. 17). As a phenomenon inseparably connected with social and historical context, charity reflects the state of a particular epoch. Through the forms it takes on in given times it shows the current social structure and dominant social and economic tendencies and also religious and ideological motifs of public activity. Its analysis constitutes basis for a broader reflection on the state of contemporary culture of western societies. For Królikowska charity is the figment of culture and results from the existence of social bonds, hence “the study devoted to it in fact becomes the study of society’ (p.19). To perform this study the author resorts to both theoretical underpinning and to empirical research.

The book is divided into two main parts and an afterword, which is summarizing the whole. The first part “Social Charity Sources’ constitutes an introduction to the discussed issue. It presents definitions of charity, takes it as a social institution and introduces deliberations on the subject of the future or vanishing character of this institution. Moreover it undertakes the issue of poor people as a social class and poverty as a contemporary social problem. At the end of this part the author presents the stratification of English society as well as the review of Brit-

ish researches on the subject of poverty and exclusion.

The second part entitled "Charity in English Society" constitutes an empirical illustration of the issues presented in the first part of the text. There are sociographies quoted here of a dozen or so charity institutions bringing help to the poor and in need – in the first chapter in Oxford and in the second in Exeter. The part concerning Oxford though is much more complex as it presents nine centres, whereas in the part devoted to Exeter we deal with merely three. Both chapters commence with a brief description of a given town and its urban and social landscape. Then individual institutions are being discussed through the prism of their targets and tasks, the description of the people benefiting from their help as well as the description of the personnel, ways of financing them, the circumstances of their creation, manners of their daily operation etc. Achieving such "an overall photo" of various centers was possible thanks to the application of many methods by the researcher – apart from the sociographic method, the analysis of the subject literature has been also applied, the analysis of available statistical data, official and training documents, and particularly essential, stressed by Królikowska (p. 22) – an overt observation. Furthermore the authors draws from various spheres – from sociological, economic, ethnographic, philosophical works as well as from personal memoirs and the press.

The afterword contains a recapitulation of the analyses and empirical research on English charity. Having relied on the ideo-

logical tendencies prevailing in British society, the sociologist points out the factors which played a key role in the shaping of axionormative bases for modern charity and practical forms of realizing it.

As soon as the "dry" description of the book been presented, it becomes apparent that Królikowska has set herself an ambitious task. By scrutinizing one aspect of social life, as charity is, she wanted to take the opportunity to express the essence of problems of the whole society and the culture ruling it. The research designed by her was quite a big project requiring a lot of time and effort, and the material gathered over its realization, was apparently uneasy to process and to draw conclusions from. Similarly the adoption of poor and dependant people viewpoint as a research assumption complicated the goals set by the researcher even further since the subjectivity of such a perspective could have affected scientifically assumed objectivity. At the same time the highly raised standards also boost our expectations, because if the assumptions were met, we would deal with a significant work saying plenty about current problems and based on a reliable research material. Unfortunately "The Sociology of Charity" does not come up to expectations and is only partially redeemed.

Firstly the book is non-objective on quite a few occasions, what is unacceptable for scientific works which this text is supposed to be. Obviously a complete independence from one's beliefs and author's ultimate impartiality are hardly achievable, but in the world of science it has become

customary to strive after objectivity. I do not see this striving in Królikowska's work. She clearly becomes part of the critique of liberal and capitalist system where individuals are reduced to the role of a consumer or at most of a producer, failing to explain thoroughly how exactly it translates into the situation of the poor, actually contenting with a statement that bad capitalism is the major source of social problems of all kinds. The longing for a virtually perfect state of prosperity becomes the main thesis. Unfortunately this prosperous country was destroyed by liberal ideology. The economic crisis which took place in England in the 80's is mentioned only in the context of the slash of benefits for the poor. However the fact that the crisis was partly due to the crisis of a prosperous state overloaded with social expenditure seems unworthy of being mentioned. The criticism of the way today's country operates, and the criticism of social affairs, are based on contrasting the mythical "once", when egalitarian society was comprised of good and comforting people, with today's global economy which does not care about the interests of its citizens despite the good intentions of past political agendas (p. 68). Thus the hypocrisy of the deadlocked UN, the communist propaganda or finally unfulfilled social promises, all the aforesaid, seem better than viable economic targets. The author too frequently tends to use a moralizing approach. She presents economic liberalism and the country founded upon it as an egotistic system where "one can only count on reproachfully granted basic help at the most" (p. 43), and

a welfare state as the one which "carries on dialogue with the most lasting values of humanity" (p. 112). By involving her argument into such a black and white critique she loses real issues resulting from the functioning of the global market economy and consumerist society, issues which undoubtedly exist and affect the lots of the poorest¹.

The author presents English society in black and white as well. Poor people are almost holy whereas British aristocracy is the parasite and cancer eating England away. Being poor is a result of either a bad fate or social and economic determinants, but never a result of one's own wrong doing or bad decisions.

The sociologist does not stop short of putting forward a thesis that women who were pregnant several times by different partners and ended up in hostels "encountered life misfortunes" (p. 250). Apparently the author believes that these women were submissive persons completely incapable of running their own lives and for this reason unable to make a mistake. Such women merely experience bad fortunes on the path of life. Moreover while dealing with poor people we tend to pay attention to their character features and appearance and she perceives this fact as an insult to people's dignity forgetting that every man living in society is assessed on common criteria. Moreover these features, even if inappropriate, result from the system oppression and

¹ Cf.: Z. Bauman, *Praca, konsumpcjonizm i nowi ubodzy*, 2006; A. Giddens, *Poza lewicą i prawicą: przyszłość polityki radykalnej*, 2001.

political and economic activity undertaken by the system. Unfortunately these types of simplifications do not serve the cause of the poor. It is an unquestionable fact that certain conditions of life and some symptoms of poor people's inability to adapt are all due to the presence of free market. Being left behind by the tax and banking system, as the author exemplarily pointed out, actually discourages the poor from any possible attempts of initiative. However putting the whole blame on the state and all misfortunes on its bad functioning is an oversimplification of the causes of poverty which are very complex.

In order to limit the poverty issue one should look at it from the realist standpoint and thanks to this perspective one should take measures appropriate to the well diagnosed causes. The fact that the author presents every individual affected by poverty as guilt free, is nothing but overlooking the other side of the coin, the side which is essential to learn the whole.

Aristocracy, on the other hand, appears as a sect allowing nobody into its world and at the same time preying on all the other members of society. Even the tax system comes under criticism. Even though it imposes one of the highest taxes in Europe on the rich, it still favours, according to the author, the interests of these wealthy people. Such a presentation of aristocracy may surprise a little in a text of a Polish researcher, who having experienced communism getting rid of elites, can see their existence in such a negative light. Regrettably without the financial elite there is no intellectual and

cultural elite either, and, however cynic it may sound, the existence of exclusive elite in Great Britain constitutes one of the most important assets around which prestige and economic prosperity of the whole state are built, thus bringing wealth to other social strata. Aristocracy in England is a valuable human capital, often envied by other countries. In the world where the rich are getting even richer and come into indecent fortunes whereas the number of the poor does not diminish even in wealthy countries, cries for a fairer distribution of goods are understandable. However one should not forget that the economic and social world is more complicated than the forest of Sharewood in the times of Robin Hood and it had already been attempted once to share everything equally for everyone in the majesty of state, which eventually resulted in a collapse of the whole system.

By raising the subject of class fights, Królikowska loses track of the purpose of helping people in need. She wants them to take, as a social class, their due and significant position in society. In other words, they are, as the class of the poor, to participate in a public discourse on equal terms with other social classes. I am not entirely convinced whether it should be the goal of the poor and of the aid directed to them. Would it not be better if they stopped being poor and did not need help? Is it not the aim of social services to bring excluded people back to the bosom of a "normal" society?

The lack of objectivity and distance on many occasions does not mean that *The Sociology of Charity* does not mention inter-

esting aspects. Królikowska shows that the rise of charitable activity results from the slump of institutional social welfare and paradoxically it means the disappearance of social bonds and collective solidarity. Charity stems from the desire to deliver aid through separate, selflessly oriented individuals, contrastingly the remaining majority of community remains neutral at best. Hence poor people often live contained in the world of social services receiving no help from their relatives nor from the community they come from. Having offloaded some of its social duties onto non-governmental organizations and local collectives, the state, calls for civic mutual aid but the response is limited. These observations seem to be apt, particularly when we have a closer look at the centres presented in the empirical part of the work. In most cases they function thanks to the zeal of one man or a small group of dedicated to the cause people who sacrifice a lot to be able to bring aid to others. The author blames the degeneration of social bonds on the dominance of middle-class liberal ideology, however I'd rather favour the conclusions of Charles Murray², who blames the state of affairs on welfare state and the dependence of its citizens on state's aid. In a society where every misfortune was assisted by social services, counting on your relatives or members of a given community was no longer needed. Social solidarity could no longer rely on mutual help if such need arose, so it practically vanished. When in the 80's Britain

faced economic recession, big reforms were introduced and the prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, slashed the social funds. The society found itself in a position it was unaccustomed to, what in the years ensuing the crisis and later on "bore fruit" in the increased number of the poor and excluded. It is still debateable what affected this increase to a larger extent – the dysfunction of communities or perhaps the drastic measures taken by the conservative government. Undoubtedly Margaret Thatcher, through statements such as "there is no such thing as society" propagated the culture of competition between individuals rather than the culture of social solidarity. And it would be difficult to defend the thesis that the government actions were only beneficial³. Nonetheless freeing oneself of one-sided perspective and taking into account in the analysis the causes of a "new" British poverty, both the flaws of a welfare state and the faults of a neoliberal state, seems to be a more appropriate solution.

The perception of charity in various European countries is also an interesting aspect to consider. In England and Germany charity is a desired complement of social and cultural activity of the state, but in Scandinavia it appears to be too paternalistic placing people in need in an awkward situation. Similarly to the situation in communist countries in the past, charity, is associated there with signalling the supe-

² Cf. Ch. Murray, *Bez korzeni*, Poznań 2001.

³ Cf. E. Majewska, J. Sowa (ed.), *Zniewolony umysł 2. Neoliberalizm i jego krytyki*, Kraków 2007.

riority of the helping person. To neutralize the sense of humiliation in people asking for help only governmental agencies have the authority to deal with charity as they are in a way objective and impersonal. It is an interesting example of how theoretically universal willingness to help the poor is yet strongly conditioned by cultural context.

The role of the Christian Church in offering help is also worth mentioning. Throughout the book there are numerous references to the Church teachings, the Bible is cited, there are clearly pinpointed religious ways of conduct. Since European charity was built on the concept of mercy and based on the activity of Church institutions, it is no wonder that there are so many references in the text to this subject. What is though particularly worth having a closer look is the issue of the Church's new task of helping the poor and in need. Especially in a situation when the number of churchgoers drastically fell and Anglican Churches were empty. In the face of society secularisation it was hard for priests to keep churches operational, hence to survive they began to adapt them to serve as orphanages, poorhouses or eating places for the homeless. In this way the Church which was in crisis acquired a new sense of purpose to continue its existence on the Isles and the poor received needed help.

Generally in the empirical part one can see the clash of ideals from the first part with the reality of social services' daily routines. The previous attempt to present poverty as suffering due to bad system does not

stand to the test of realities. For it turns out that one cannot help everyone. Drunk people, drug addicts or people under 25 are not allowed to the centres. The latter because younger people were aggressive at times. However these limitations do not result from mind infecting liberal ideology or sheer practice and the will to provide security to as many wards and personnel. Therefore the exclusion has at times practical and worldly grounds, the fact which Królikowska previously had no intention to admit to, nor the desire to remember about it while doing her general analyses. On some occasions she even contradicts herself or the things she wrote in other parts of the text. When discussing nightshelter for the youth she admits that many young people become reliant on the help of institutions and they do not want to become self-sufficient whereas earlier she claimed that such argumentation from the supporters of social expenditure reduction was hypocritical and insincere. She also observes that some people end up in the street on their own accord just following their own paths of life, a fact which was formerly attributed only and exclusively to social and economic determinants.

The book contains a good deal of interesting and instructive descriptions of social services sites. All the described institutions operate well and are financed both from private and public or local resources. They are generally approved of by local communities. They have appropriately equipped premises and specialized personnel as well as volunteers. Sociographies of these centres could

be set as examples for Polish social services since they illustrate well how aid should be brought effectively. For example the broadly discussed creation of mutual assistance funds, the nationwide programme of youth re-adaptation, the circulation of second hand furniture and the contact centre in particular – a neutral meeting point for children and adults in the middle of divorce; all the aforementioned are worth trying to be adopted to suit Polish needs. However instead of making her text a source of ideas and inspirations which could be introduced into Polish social work reality, Królikowska, preferred to lean towards criticism of British people and their state. In my opinion it is a bad depiction of the issue and the book would have been a much more and useful title if its central theme had been the presentation of a free market oriented society. Society which is still very capable of maintaining charity and social services despite gradual loss of social bonds. Yet by complaining about the condition of charity in England and by clearly failing to stay impartial while presenting the complexity of issues causing poverty, the author annoys us and regrettably does not win our acclaim and sympathy for the cause of poor people. We might even interpret her theses as her discontent with the return of distant charity initiatives, which, in a way, she perceives as the side effect of the disassembly of a welfare state (p. 336). I would see in them sign of change though, (the change around which) communities will be reborn and on this foundation social bonds and local mutual assistance will be slowly rebuilt.

There has been sincere involvement and tremendous amount of work in Królikowska's study of the world of the English poor and institutions helping them.

As far as methodology is concerned her work is even excellent – meticulously arranged structure of successive centres creates order and ease of moving among them and comparing them. All the most important aspects of institution operation have been discussed and the information sources have been provided along with every institution she mentioned. Unfortunately the author penetrated this world too deeply and forcefully and by doing so she lost her scientific objectivity. All of this can be confirmed by the fact that in the part devoted to Exeter, the town where she had spent less time, her discourse is more matter-of-fact and Królikowska uses her moralizing tone on fewer occasions, thus she presents the causes of poverty and specific problems more diligently. When she manages to maintain a larger distance then one can receive and understand the issues she deals with much better.

The Sociology of Charity despite its brilliant empirical research, despite the author's involvement and valuable descriptions of the activity of social services is not a good title. Królikowska squandered the chance of an interesting analysis by adopting suitable theses, which she could not entirely defend. Non-objectivity and partiality she allowed in her work irritate and bring on reluctance towards the significant, delicate and requiring a thorough analysis cause of the poor and the aid directed to them. And even the

issue of charity has turned out to be very interesting, the way it has been presented is inapt.

Aleksandra Zienko

Jadwiga Królikowska: A Comment on the Review of the Book "The Sociology of Charity"

The review of the book 'The Sociology of Charity' has been written in a very efficient way; one may not find it difficult to believe the Reviewer that she has written it when being irritated, and at the same time, she does cope with keeping the proper review form, especially as for matching the language and text technique. As far as the formal side is concerned, the text could be also (or maybe above all) written by a professor, the reason being that it differs, to a high extent, from the ones written by IV year students.

One can notice that there are two comment levels outlined in the review. In the first one the Author makes an analysis of the substantial quality of the work, the methodology, the depth of the researched institutions analysis, etc.

The Reviewer's evaluation seems to be completely positive. As for the background, the work is analysed in the perspective that can be named 'the only right ideology of the correct moderation'. The student claims that the work has been written in an incorrect perspective, and, this is the reason why, in spite of 'the excellent empiric research, the author's involvement, and very valuable de-

scriptions of the help centres operations, it is not a good work'. Furthermore, the Reviewer accuses the work that 'it is not objective, which is, as for the research works which the text is supposed to be, unacceptable'. The student may not be aware of the fact that in the west science today there is no the only 'objective paradigm' in social sciences, and if anyone thinks there is, he or she is in the minority. The postulated by the student methodological 'gold centre' may be of a meaning for a young man who wants to make a career, especially in politics, but for sure not in science. Nota bene, if the young career maker could force his scientific thesis in the public life, a thesis on 'the only right' vision of the social development, it must have had an influence on the fundamental re-shaping of the democratic debate and the dawn of several public disagreements. The west science, from time to time, undergoes some crisis of 'paradigms' in single disciplines, however, one cannot talk about 'the only right perspective', of which acceptance would influence our understanding of the scientific research freedom.

The student may be unaware of what really is 'the safe introduction' to the work in the PRL state, a work written from an incorrect (in those days bourgeois) perspective. In such an introduction one could sometimes find some published work of a west policy supporter, work including several pages and written according to a form, toutes proportions gardées – one which was accepted by a Reviewer in an efficient and spontaneous way. One should also praise several detailed thesis, pay attention to the